

Exercise & Health:

Staying active for your physical and mental health



Regular exercise is a critical part of staying healthy. People who are active live longer and feel better. The Surgeon General recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days per week.

The benefits of exercise

The merits of exercise — from preventing chronic health conditions to boosting confidence and self-esteem — are hard to ignore. And the benefits are yours for the taking, regardless of age, sex or physical ability.

Here are just a few of the advantages physical fitness brings:

- Reduces your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, diabetes, and obesity
- Keeps joints, tendons and ligaments flexible, which makes it easier to move around
- Reduces some of the effects of aging
- Contributes to your mental well-being and helps treat depression
- Helps relieve stress and anxiety improving your mood
- Increases your energy and endurance
- Helps you sleep better
- Helps put the spark back into your sex life – men who exercise are less likely to have erectile dysfunction than those who don't
- Helps you maintain a normal weight by increasing your metabolism (the rate you burn calories)



How much exercise do you need?

Talk to your doctor about how much exercise is right for you. A good goal for many people is to work up to exercising four to six times a week for 30 to 60 minutes at a time. Remember, that exercise has so many health benefits that any amount is better than none.

If you've been inactive for awhile, use a sensible approach and start out slowly. Begin with a 10-minute period of light exercise or a brisk walk every day and gradually increase how hard you exercise and for how long.

How to stay motivated

The key is to find the right exercise for you. If you enjoy it, you are more likely to stay motivated. You may want to walk with a friend, take a dance class or plan a group bike ride or hike. If you vary your routine, you may be less likely to get bored or injured. Walk one day – bicycle the next.

Don't get discouraged. It can take weeks or months before you notice some of the changes from exercise, such as weight loss.

How to prevent injuries

Start every workout with stretching and a warm-up. This will make your muscles and joints more flexible. Spend five to 10 minutes doing some light calisthenics and stretching exercises, and perhaps brisk walking. Do the same thing when you're done working out until your heart rate returns to normal.

Pay attention to your body. Stop exercising if you feel very out of breath, dizzy, faint, nauseous or have pain.

The American Academy of Family Physicians recommends these tips for sneaking exercise into your day:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Go for a walk during your coffee break or lunch
- Walk all or part of the way to work
- Do housework at a fast pace
- Rake leaves or do other yard work



What is cardiovascular exercise?

Cardiovascular exercise, also known as "cardio" or aerobic exercise, moves large muscle groups and causes you to breathe more deeply and your heart to work harder to pump blood. It improves the health of your heart and lungs.

Examples include walking, jogging, running, aerobic dance, bicycling, rowing, swimming and cross-country skiing.

What is weight-bearing exercise?

The term weight-bearing is used to describe exercises that work against the force of gravity. Weight-bearing exercise is important for building strong bones. Having strong bones helps prevent osteoporosis and bone fractures later in life.

Weight training, or strength training, builds strength and muscles. Lifting weights is a weight-training exercise. Calisthenics like push-ups are weight-training exercises too. If you have high blood pressure or other health problems, talk to your family doctor before beginning weight training.

What is the best kind of exercise?

The best exercise is the one you'll do on a regular basis.

Walking is considered one of the best choices because it's easy, safe and inexpensive. Brisk walking can burn as many calories as running, but is less likely than running or jogging to cause injuries. Walking also doesn't require any training or special equipment, except for good shoes.

We're here to help

If you are a Blue Shield member and have questions about exercise or weight loss, you can talk or chat online with a registered nurse day or night, through Blue Shield of California's NurseHelp 24/7sm. Call 1-877-304-0504 or visit **blueshieldca.com** and click on Health & Wellness.